



State of New Jersey
HIGHER EDUCATION

Governor Chris Christie
Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno
Secretary of Higher Education Rochelle Hendricks

Christie Administration Honors Academic Excellence of 767 Disadvantaged Students; Stories of Triumph Over Long Odds Highlight Awards Ceremony

Educational Opportunity Fund Helps Students on 41 Campuses throughout New Jersey

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, April 29, 2014

Contact: Alan Guenther
Audrey Bennerson
(609) 984-2804
(609) 984-2751

Academic excellence and the strength of the human spirit were celebrated as 767 Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) students from throughout the Garden State were honored Friday by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education. The EOF provides financial assistance and support services to students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who attend New Jersey's institutions of higher learning and meet academic requirements.

Dozens of the graduating students who attended the ceremony at Georgian Court University fought circumstances that might have defeated less determined individuals. For example, Teresa Alston, a busy mother from Englewood, overcame breast cancer and chemotherapy treatment, only to later find that she needed knee replacement surgery. Undaunted, she made it to classes by using a walker. She will graduate from Bergen Community College this year and plans to study nursing at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

In the Camden area, Ernest Lindsay became involved with drugs and the criminal justice system. Five years ago, he entered a drug treatment program and began to turn his life around. He will graduate from Camden County College in May and transfer to the Rutgers School of Social Work. Now in his own apartment, he has restored ties with his family and recently married.

In Newark, Thomas Carswell, who is legally blind, will graduate in May from Essex County College with an associate's degree in Business Administration. He plans to continue his education at Montclair State University this fall.

Ria Nathan relocated to the United States from Trinidad in 2003. After moving to Jersey City in 2005, Nathan earned her high school diploma at the Hudson County School of Technology and later enrolled in Hudson County Community College in 2011. She graduated last year and has been accepted at New Jersey City University where she will pursue a bachelor's degree in Health Science, hoping to ultimately earn a Doctorate in Psychology.

"The Educational Opportunity Fund is a model of excellence and equity, with an exceptional record of helping students achieve their educational goals," said Secretary of Higher Education Rochelle Hendricks, whose office administers the program. "These talented students

demonstrate the transformative value of higher education and the importance of ensuring that this program remains available as the gateway to a better life for generations to come.”

“Many students receiving awards are the first in their families to attend college. We are very proud of the students in the EOF family,” said State EOF Program Director Audrey Bennerson. “The success of the students is due to their own hard work, and the dedication and attention to detail paid by the program directors and staff on 41 campuses around the State.”

Created in 1968, New Jersey’s EOF program has gained national recognition as one of the most comprehensive state-supported efforts to expand access to higher education. More than 12,000 undergraduate students are enrolled in campus-based programs that provide financial assistance and services that improve student retention and graduation rates. The program also encourages participants to pursue advanced degrees.

#

To contact or publish names of local students: Many of the students who triumphed over long odds are available for local interviews. The names of hometown awardees are grouped by the local college they attended in the document being sent with this release. Interviews with students may be arranged by contacting Alan Guenther of the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education at (609) 984-2804. Students whose names appear in this press release or on the list of awardees have granted permission for their names to be published.